Between the Angels and the Apes

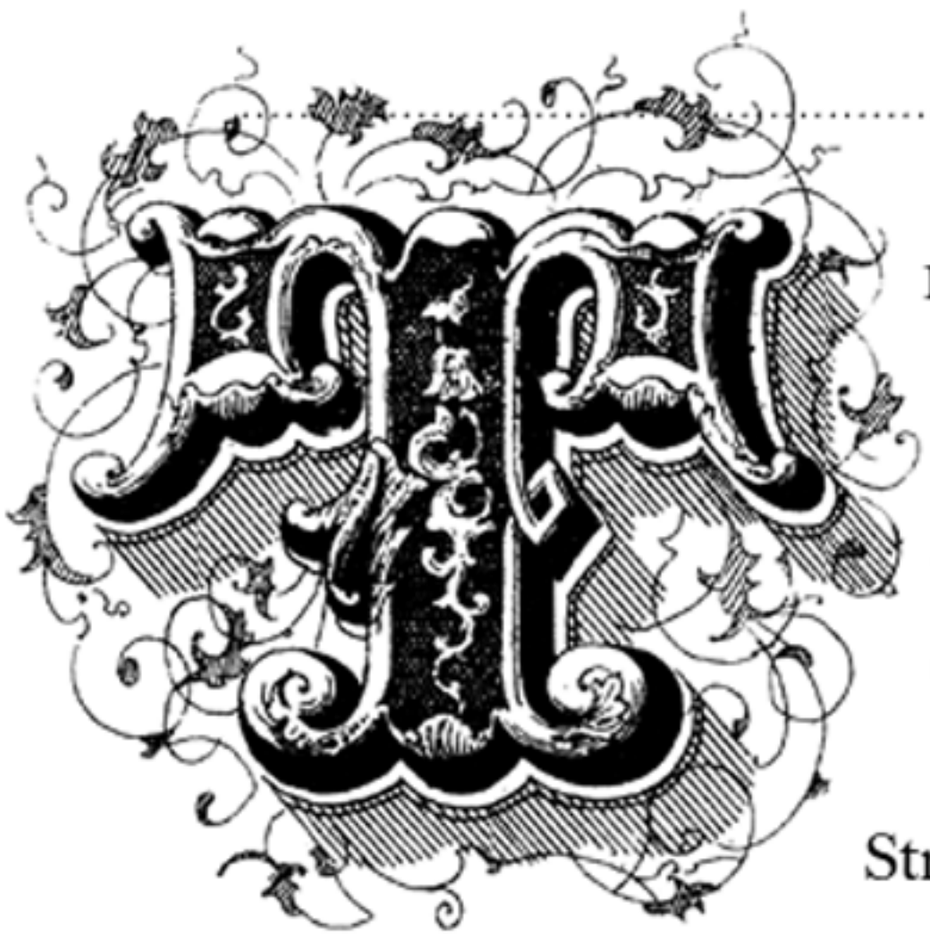
Alan Moore

Notes and extracts from an incomplete operatic life of Dr John Dee



Journal Four

Introduction





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Between the Angels and the Apes

by ALAN MOORE

In 2008, I was contacted by the Manchester International Festival and told that the pop group Gorillaz were keen to work with me on a follow-up to their *Monkey: Journey to the West* opera.

When it was suggested that the opera might be magically-themed, I proposed that it could focus on the alchemists, since Monteverdi initially created the concept of opera to convey his own alchemical ideas. With this in mind, and bearing in mind that the opera would first have been staged in Manchester, I thought that the best choice for a subject would be Queen Elizabeth's alchemist, adviser and astrologer John Dee, who spent some years exiled to Manchester during his later life.

The idea was accepted enthusiastically and I began work on the libretto. Sadly, however, for various reasons the opera was not to be. Here I present my initial outline, and as much of the libretto as I had written when the project was abandoned.

Dee illustration by ARIK ROPER

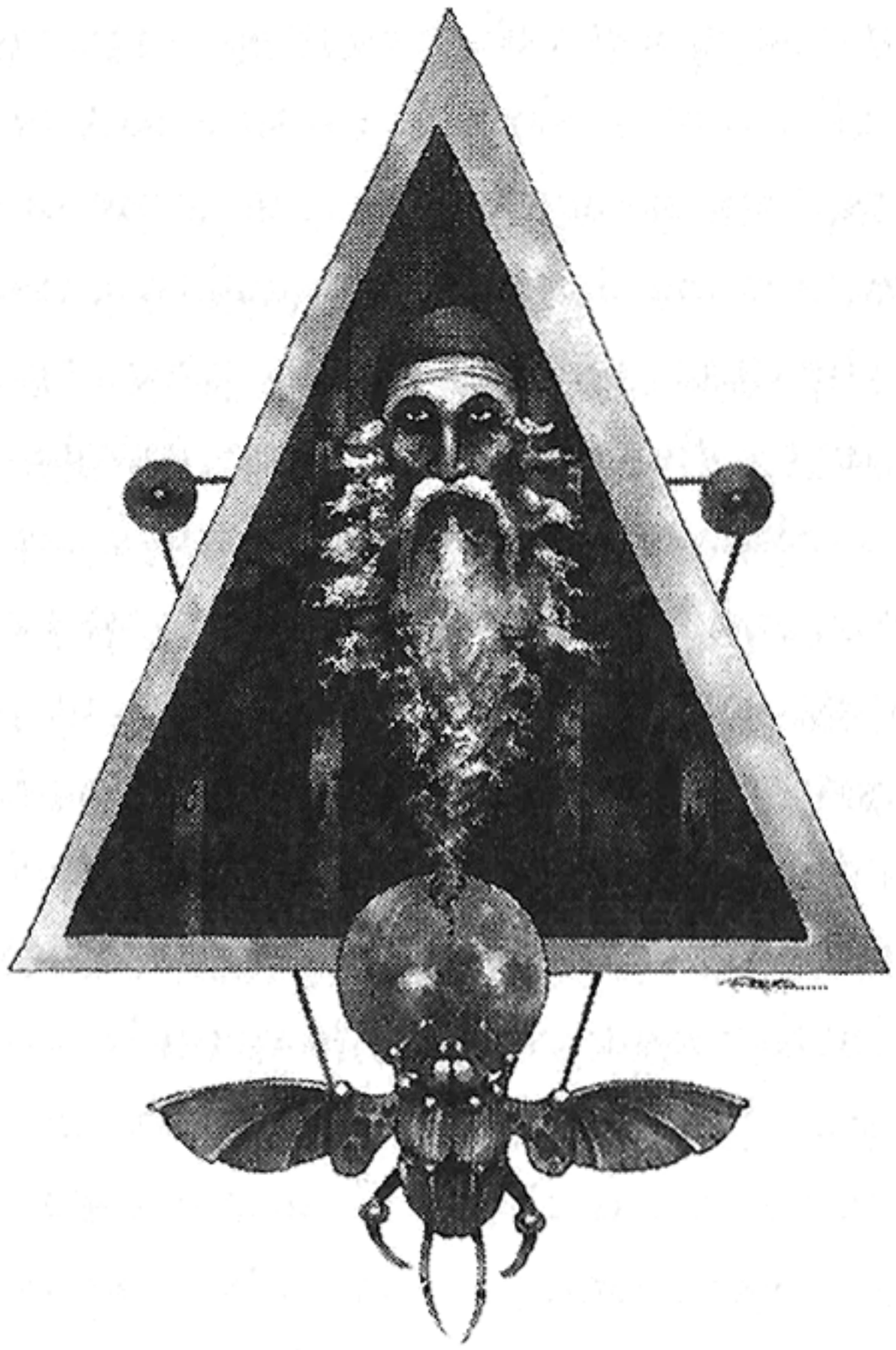
The Outline

If we're to create an approximately ninety-minute piece on the subject of Greatest Dead Englishman John Dee, then a solid and conventional place to start structurally would be a classic three-act construction with sections of a half-hour each. This also seems to fit nicely with the triangular Greek delta symbol (which is how Dee identifies himself in the facsimile notes presented in *A True & Faithful Relation of What Passed for Many Yeers between Dr John Dee and Some Spirits* [Meric Casaubon, 1659] and is also the elemental symbol for fire, which is in turn the element that represents the highest spiritual component of the magician or, indeed, the ordinary human being).

We will open and close the piece with a framing device built around the doctor's final days at Mortlake, with the magus in decline like Prospero upon his isle, attended only by his loyal daughter and his spirits. (Or, if you prefer, like Dr Morbius in the derivative 1956 film *Forbidden Planet*, on his isolated world attended only by his daughter Altaira, Robby the Robot, and the Caliban-like Creature of the Id.) It would also be useful to have the Mortlake scene to return to as a kind of punctuation at the pivotal plot-points that, with a three act structure, occur at roughly thirty minutes and an hour into our ninety-minute piece.

Let's say that the Mortlake scenes, of which there are four, are all approximately seven minutes long. That would mean that the three lengthy 'flashback' scenes (which make up the bulk of our narrative and which are bracketed by the Mortlake sequences) would be just over twenty minutes each.

The first scene would establish the whole of the situation: who Dee is; who his daughter is; the fact that he is still in communication with his spirit entities (or at least believes himself to be); the fact that he is in Mortlake and in exile; and the fact that he is outcast and dying, this man who in his lifetime has shaped the entire world. I figure that dramatically our strongest opening would be John Dee alone, save for his spirits. His daughter, while she should be mentioned as an off-stage presence, should probably be saved until one of the later Mortlake sections, so that we can make more of her.



It also strikes me that with this very first scene we could break the fourth wall, and have the dying magus in some way aware of the audience that is watching him. He doesn't perceive the rows of seats that he glimpses rising all around him as a theatre audience, however, but as strange and unearthly 'spirits of futurity' that are watching over him in his final hours. After we've established all this, the opening scene would conclude with the doctor in a reflective state, considering his current condition and casting his mind back to his origins.

This would lead nicely into our first twenty-minute sequence, in which we should obviously include all the interesting bits from the early life of John Dee – the flying beetle and all the other relevant stuff, perhaps as a drifting psychedelic montage of events – while making our principal focus the time that Dee spent in prison for treason after casting an inauspicious horoscope for Queen Mary. Dee's cellmate during this time was a strange and peripheral character named Bartlett Green, who was coincidentally a leper. His appearance in Dee's life right at the time when Dee was facing possible execution and thus going through

a long night of the soul, just before he was taken under the wing of the new Queen Elizabeth, makes him into a sort of dark messenger figure who can perhaps be used to set up some of the themes and motifs that will recur in our drama. The initial twenty-minute sequence would end with the death of Queen Mary, Dee's release from prison and his first meeting with the Faerie Queen, Elizabeth. I suspect that Dee's devotion to Elizabeth was at least partially erotically inspired: that he fancied her, and that in part the Queen was a kind of ethereal muse to the Doctor, as well as his most important patron. Although Elizabeth has been pretty much done to death as far as drama and film are concerned, I think that since she played such a major part in Dee's life and fortunes she needs to loom large in our presentation. But I also think that by focussing on the otherworldly or erotic aspects of the monarch, as seen through Dee's eyes, we should be able to create a portrait of Elizabeth that is distinctive and unusual enough to make the character seem fresh again. So, that's where we end our first major sequence before returning to the now elderly and dying doctor, stuck in Mortlake in the year of 1605.

The second seven-minute Mortlake sequence would be a good place to introduce Dee's daughter. Perhaps the preceding flashback scene is terminated by the arrival of his daughter at his bedside, bringing him a meal and interrupting his reverie. We could then have a scene where Dee and his daughter have a conversation while she is feeding him his gruel or whatever it is. They could make reference to the fact that only they survive out of Dee's whole extended family, and we could get a sense of the complex feelings that they have for each other. Dee's daughter loves and respects her father deeply, but we also get the sense that she has many private doubts concerning the reality of his spirit transmissions. She might even privately feel that her father's obsession with the 'human loving' spirits of the Book of Enoch has done much to mess up the lives of everyone concerned. If her dad hadn't had a reputation as a sorcerer, would King James have banished him to Manchester, where plague had claimed most of his family? Dee, meanwhile, needs his daughter to love and believe in him, because

she's all that he has left in the way of companionship that someone else can see as well.

This is the cue for our second twenty-minute section, in which we document the extraordinary rise of Dr Dee. We probably speed through his enlistment as a spy by Francis Walsingham, his meteoric rise through Elizabethan society and its intellectual life (perhaps exemplified by a scene depicting a meeting of 'The School of Night' with Shakespeare, Marlowe, Raleigh, Furman et al) and his invention of the British Empire to get to the meat of our story, which is Dee's meeting with Edward Kelly. As an aside, would it be possible to have the same performer play Kelly who played Bartlett Green in our first flashback sequence, but obviously sans leper makeup? To make a subtle connection between these two mysterious figures (both of whom had bits of their bodies missing) would be almost to suggest, at least poetically, that both Green and Kelly were perhaps representatives of the same otherworldly realm that would govern most of Dr Dee's life. The same performer might even take the part of a principal Enochian spirit in our finale, to carry through the idea. Anyway, once Dee and Kelly have connected we can conclude this second section with their first full-blown invocation of the Enochian spirits. (It also occurs to me that we will need at least two or ideally three performers to take the part of Dee himself. The main one will be the elderly and dying Dee who both opens and closes the opera, but we might need two other performers to depict Dee at the three stages of his life that we are documenting in the dying doctor's flashback reminiscences.)

The following brief seven-minute section back in Mortlake might involve the doctor being once more disturbed from his reminiscences, not by his daughter this time, or by his Enochian spirits, but by ordinary ghosts, people who have meant a lot in Dee's life but are now dead. Perhaps his wife Jane would be foremost amongst these, but there are lots of other possibilities for spectral, special-effects figures to gather ethereally around Dee's deathbed. This sequence could be used to introduce the ominous reverberations that will sound throughout the rest of Dee's life: his wife's ghost might seem reproachful of the doctor,

clearly still resentful of some great ordeal he put her through. We can leave the specific details of Jane Dee's complaint still vague at this point, but it will set up the dark premise of the disastrous wife-swap that we shall explore in our third and final twenty-minute sequence. Perhaps this interlude between Dee and the ghosts is ended when his daughter bursts into the bedchamber, having heard her father talking with someone. The moment that she does, of course, the spectres vanish. After having ascertained that Dee is all right for the moment his daughter retreats, leaving the doctor to consider that dark down-slope of his life that led him to his present grim condition.

Our third and last twenty-minute sequence probably commences with Dee having been commanded by the angels to take Kelly and their families to Europe, where he's been instructed to confront the Emperor Rudolph and accuse him of consorting with infernal spirits. Improbably, this all works out okay and Dee and Kelly are soon working at producing gold by alchemy for their new patron, and are also letting their angel experiments transport them into increasingly murky waters. When the angels tell them they must 'have their wives in common', they reluctantly go along with it and the whole story of their success begins to unravel from that point on. It's almost as if Choronzon, the terrifying 'demon of dispersal' who inhabits the thirty-third Enochian aether, is somehow tearing up the doctor's life and scattering it to the wind. After the wife-swap, Dee and Kelly's partnership collapses. Kelly scries a final and apocalyptic message from the terrible female entity Babalon and then in consequence gives up the Art forever. He stays in Bohemia while Dee and family return to England, but is soon dead of infection after falling from a turret from which he was trying to escape. Back at home, Elizabeth dies and the ferociously puritanical and anti-magical King James takes the throne. James issues an edict that declares fairies to be in fact demons, and banishes Dee and his family to Manchester, where plague will claim most of them. This penultimate sequence perhaps ends with the defeated and tragic figure of the bereaved Dr Dee about to return to Mortlake to die, to the very shores of death itself, attended only by his daughter and his spirits.

This brings us to our final seven-minute scene where Dee is finally dying. This would be best if it was attended by his doubting daughter. She is, as far as she knows, the only being with her father when he dies. However, we can bring the show to a spectacular conclusion with the Doctor's dying vision: he is transfixed by the understanding that, as Emanuel Swedenborg would later remark, 'angels know nothing of time.' The universe is timeless, and perhaps we return to our opening idea of Dee glimpsing the extraordinary, and to him incomprehensible, sight of the modern audience watching him from four hundred years in the future. After Dee has delivered an address to the future, to the world that he has created, we have a final imprecation to the spirits (who his attending daughter refuses to believe are real) just before he breathes his last. Instead of an answer from the angels of the aethers, there can be a doubting silence that seems to go on and on until we are certain that Dee's beliefs were nothing but elaborate delusions. At this point, the first of our planted angels in the audience stands up and starts to sing and we build into an overwhelming fugue of angel voices and visual spectacle that perhaps leaves the audience gazing into the giant black mirror for a few strange minutes before we close in to total blackness and silence.

Okay, having established a rough shape for the piece, I suppose some thought should be given to a tentative cast list of characters and players that we will need.

Firstly, of course, there is Dee himself. As noted above, we may well need two or three performers in the role of Dee. The principal role would be that of the dying doctor, who will probably be fairly motionless on his ornate deathbed throughout the entire performance, and depending on how we set up the performance area may also be at least dimly visible to the audience throughout the whole show. I see this, our 'main' Dr Dee, as being a baritone… perhaps a medium-range baritone, although this is not really my area of expertise. I figure we should save the really startling deep bass register for some of the more alarming Enochian spirits. The other, younger versions of John Dee should probably also be voiced by someone in the same baritone register.

Dee's daughter, while perhaps of less significance in Dee's actual life than somebody like Edward Kelly, is in terms of our drama an important through-character who is with the audience at regular intervals throughout the narrative, right up until its end. I see her as being an attractive woman in her thirties or early forties… I'm not sure of her actual age but I doubt that she could have been terribly young at the time, with her father so incredibly old and all her other siblings dead. Someone who suggests a fiery strength of resolve and character, but with huge reserves of deep compassion. Again, I'm even worse at categorising women's voices than I am with men, beyond observing that it should be a pure and strong voice, whatever that means.

Edward Kelly must be next on our list, and as mentioned earlier I think it might add a resonance to the drama if the same performer we have for Kelly could also play Dee's leprous cellmate Bartlett Green in the first flashback sequence and one of the prominent Enochian presences towards the end of the opera. I see Kelly, while not being an evil or fraudulent man, as nevertheless having an aura of sinister presence about him. (The same will be true if the performer is portraying Bartlett Green or one of the major Enochian spirits.) I'm guessing again, but would a bass tenor register suit that kind of character?

Queen Elizabeth should be a strange and fey character with a slight whiff of hereditary madness around her. This shouldn't be played for laughs, as with Miranda Richardson's sterling performance in *Blackadder*, but should be used to accentuate the fact that English royalty of this period (and, arguably, any other period) were incredibly strange and exotic creatures who were literally as different from the human beings around them as if they actually had been the faerie race of Spenser's poem. I see her as having a very high and tinkling voice, to emphasise her remoteness and unearthliness. I also see the Queen, in the context of Dee, as a strikingly sexual character. Given that most of this drama only happens in the doctor's reminiscences, I figure we have some license to depict historical figures and events through a lens of dream-like and fantastical memory, so that our depiction of Elizabeth could be a kind of sexualized and highly-imaginative fantasy

of Elizabeth, dressed accordingly in a feverish and dream-like re-imagining of Elizabethan costumes. This fantastical and psychedelic approach to the Elizabethan period could extend to our set designs and might generate some wonderful visual ideas, which wouldn't be entirely out of keeping with the mystical and flamboyant spirit of the period. This approach might yield some musical ideas as well, when considering the intensely mathematical and Hendrix-fast harpsichord pieces that were being composed at the time.

As regards the cast-list of what you might call secondary characters, we will need someone – perhaps a relatively elderly someone – to portray the spymaster Sir Francis Walsingham. We would need a voice, perhaps a light tenor voice that could suggest an immense intellect which is both dispassionate and calculating.

We would need an Emperor Rudolph, whom I can't help but see (at least at this early stage) as a less camp and more terrifying version of Brian Blessed, probably with a deep baritone voice. Deeper than Dee's own, which will perhaps make them seem more mismatched during what I think should be a fairly electrifying scene when Dee first confronts the deranged and tyrannical Emperor.

We would need performers as Dee's wife Jane – whom I see as being a kind, generous, striking-looking woman with perhaps a faint air of melancholy about her – and as Edward Kelly's wife, whom I'm afraid I haven't found the name of yet. (Don't worry, I'll be getting my friend, mentor and Elizabethan expert Steve Moore to help me with the research on this project, once I get the writing properly underway.) I see Kelly's wife as being a more worldly, pragmatic and perhaps more sexually flirtatious woman than the loyal and godly Jane Dee. I think that after Kelly's death, it was not long before she attached herself to some powerful figure or other, with the means to care for her and for her and Kelly's daughter. This is not to suggest that she was being anything other than sensible during what must have been a precarious time, but I somehow get the feeling that Mrs Kelly was nevertheless a very different character to Jane Dee, and of the two women would probably have the more strident and the least gentle voice.

We will certainly need performers to voice the Enochian spirits, but I'm not really sure which of these we'll be using yet, with the exceptions of Choronzon and the Whore-Goddess Babalon. Choronzon should have a truly frightening bass growl that rattles the furniture and fittings and sets off mild internal bleeding amongst the audience. I don't think it matters what the voice-artist looks like, as I imagine that Choronzon would best be visually portrayed by some disorienting and monstrous special effect. Babalon is a very different kettle of fish, and would need the most scarily beautiful and most scarily-voiced woman that anyone has ever imagined. Good luck with that.

Opening Scene

Dee: I wake. What year is this, what time?

I wake from blazing dreams. The salt ache in my bladder warns that I am yet alive, although not long, pray God. Not very long.

Here in my Mortlake, on my pond of death, the world I made recedes from me like tide. I hear my daughter in another room, the sighs she makes, the clattering of pots, yet save for she I am by all this murderous and copulating world forgot.

The alabaster Queen and all her curls of tangerine are flown away, with in their wake my favour and my fame. I hear the whisperings of spies no more, nor yet the baboon rants of Emperors. Save one, my family were took by plague.

This yellow matter knuckled from my eyes; the amber droplets shaken from my prick: are these the only gold wrought by my alchemy? I chained the stars and with them tamed the sea. I shrank the universe into a sign. I shaped an empire from the empty air and once, with feathered voices everywhere, an alphabet of destiny was mine. Their As I taught to them, their Bs and Cs, refracted in my gem. But what of Dee? I break wind and it is to me a music, who had the conversation of the spheres.

I hear my daughter in another room. Sometimes she'll sing a line or two, then cease, as if made mindful of my drear decline. I wish she'd carry on. The powdered throngs of dukes and conjurors are gone

and I am all alone save she…and thee.

I see you dimly as in a black glass, rising to darkness in your silent rows like a tribunal or a circus mob, and all of your strange eyes are fixed on me.

What are you? Whence comes this unearthly crew that I have sensed about me all my days as through a curtain or a hanging cloth, betrayed now by a whisper, now a cough? What are you? Lamps infernal or divine, suspended in our sooty firmament, who watch us stumble through our clumsy lines and offer neither jeers nor yet applause. What are you, and what bloodless realm is thine?

Are all our strivings and adulteries but the diversion of a phantom horde that shifts impatient on its cirrus chairs, consults its playbills while men live or die, and only stares? What are you? In the book that Enoch writ are powers that loveth earthly things too well, thrown down from grace until eternity, cast out by the Almighty. Is it thee? Are our beloved mortal fields your hell?

Or be ye spirits of futurity born only of a frantic, flailing mind, desperate to know he left something behind, imagining a world that's yet to be where all of his asylum speculations are proved true? I hope I am still God's man. What are you?

But see, how he converses with himself and wonders that folk think him ill of mind. I rave, and weep, and gaze into my stone and I entreat the seraphs and the thrones for counsel on the blood that's in my stool, with their reply ambiguous, with their reply ambiguous when they reply at all.

I hear my daughter in another room and am undone to think she pities me. I would to her be limned in blinding suns. I would my garment were the boundless sky and in her gaze reflected know that I was all my century's light: I was John Dee.

I was not ever this rain-sodden sketch with half my lines erased, my colours run, nor always did I navigate a path no further than the sorry chamber-pot. Rather I measured oceans with my stride and numbers told to me their secret names. I drew the circles and I spoke the words that half our reeking globe is stood upon, yet men shall rake my

grave smooth when I'm gone and then to the uncomprehending flame, to the perusal of illiterate fires, consign my library. I was a fellow to the School of Night and when Kit Marlowe wrote of Faust, he wrote of me.

In my jet mirror is the future now all clouds with nothing there to read, nothing to scry. My present is pared down to these stark walls that are my last horizons, are my final skies and yet so close, so near, so shabby where the lining-paper sags. In place of constellations, only cracks. Below, within my penitentiary flesh, a great dismantling proceeds unchecked.

My vistas and my panoramas are unfolded nowhere, save in memory. Both my tomorrows and todays are done. The unrecoverable past is all my pasture now, my only liberty, when I was Jack of Angels and the heavens were alight; when I was known by men, and by those more than men. When I was young, when I stared down the florid monster of Bohemia in his den, for in my glass I'd bested worse, far worse than he. When I was young, I was the pivot of the world.

I was John Dee.

Staging Notes

Now some ideas as to how we could arrange the stage area. I must admit that having just a delta symbol as our title is growing on me. Following on from this, would it be practical or useful to design our stage area around the same basic upright triangle? It struck me that a massive triangular stage could be constructed which, keeping to our vague theme of the number three, would be divided into three horizontal levels. At the apex of the triangle, the smallest of our three stages, we could have the tiny room in Mortlake where the eighty-year-old John Dee is engaged in the protracted act of dying, as seen during our seven minute opening and the other interleaving seven-minute sections.

Down at the triangle's base would be the widest of our three stages, which I suggest could be used for all of our flashback sequences that detail Dee's remembrance of his past. In the first twenty-minute scene, for example, the material dealing with Dee and Bartlett Green

in their cell at Lambeth Palace and with Dee's subsequent freeing and reception from the newly-crowned Queen Elizabeth would all be acted out upon the bottom stage. Being the widest stage, this seems most practical given the broad sweep of historical scenes that we'll be called on to enact, and also perhaps gives a sense that, as opposed to the cramped limitations of the attic-like space containing Dee's deathbed up at the apex of the triangle, the world of Dee's remembered past had much wider horizons.

Between these two layers we have our middle stage, where I suggest we place all of what we might call our aetheric or imaginary action. This would include perhaps the visionary doings of some of Dee's Enochian spirits, but would also be useful as a space in which to present other, baser kinds of fantasy such as the fantastical tabloid imaginings and rumour-mongering of the two comedy guards at the opening of our first flashback sequence below, when they are giving us their rundown of Dee's early life and of the diabolical activities that he's supposed to be in prison for. This may also provide a place and a platform for any ghostly visitants that Dee may encounter later, with characters like the deceased Jane Dee appearing on this middle stage and calling up through the floorboards to where Dee lies on his deathbed above, calling to him from this layer of imagination just beneath his feet.

Of course, this leaves us with two dead spaces that are outside the confines of the central three-level triangle, to its upper left and upper right. It occurs to me that maybe these zones would useful for the placement of two screen-areas, upon which we could project filmed material to augment the action taking place on the three stages, as and where necessary. For example, in the first of our three twenty-odd minute flashback scenes below, I thought that perhaps the screen areas to either side of the triangular stage could be used to show us images of the giant coarse faces of the two guards, seen through the barred aperture in a cell door, as they peer in at the audience as if looking in on their prisoners. Their opening dialogue could be delivered by their enlarged screen images rather than by

their relatively small physical presences upon the stage, if they even need to be present on stage at all.

The guards' recounting of their sensationalised version of Dee's early history, perhaps with the guards peering in through the barred aperture in the cell door and speaking from the screen areas as described above, could have an accompanying pageant of imagined action taking place upon our middle stage. This would be the 'psychedelic montage' mentioned in my opening notes, and could be as lurid and mad as we liked. The flying beetle scene would take place on (or would at least be launched from) this level, and I figure that we can make the spectre of Mary Tudor that will also turn up in the guard's account into a grotesque and striking portrait of this grim and troubled monarch. Given that Mary was desperate to produce an heir, to the point where her right-hand man was supposed to be scouring the slums looking for a pretend heir to abduct, and where the Queen herself went through a phantom pregnancy before succumbing to what was probably ovarian cancer, would it be too much to have our Mary sporting a surreal inflatable pregnant belly that can balloon to a ridiculous size before it pops? This is just an idea of the kind of treatment and imagery that I thought might be appropriate, counterpointed as it is by the raucous commentary of the two on-screen guards and by the isolated figures of the young John Dee and his even younger cellmate Bartlett Green as they sit, silently at first, in their small, hemmed-in region at the centre of the wide bottom stage just beneath all the hallucinatory action that's taking place upon the middle tier.

I'd like to take a moment to just get straight how the visuals of the performance are proceeding. We've opened with blackness in which the triangular structure of the stage area will not immediately be apparent. I suggest that we have the two screen areas to the upper left and right of the central triangle lit up from the very beginning, before the performance starts. Since the opening screened image is as seen looking out from inside a cell through the barred aperture in the door, then these illuminated screen areas will just look like design elements, areas of vertical black and white stripes, until the giant faces

of the guards lean into view beyond them, peering down disdainfully at the audience, which might perhaps be quite visually startling if the audience weren't expecting it.

So, we have a blacked out stage, save for these two enigmatic barred design areas to the upper left and right. When the lights go up on the first seven-minute scene, then we presumably need only to light up the relatively tiny topmost stage, up at the apex of the triangle. The triangular structure of the whole stage will still probably not be apparent to the audience throughout this first opening scene, which just features the one illuminated spot with the eighty-year-old John Dee's deathbed musings in March 1609.

As the scene ends, immediately after the last, fiercely declaratory 'I was John Dee', the lights on the top stage dim just as the lights on the bottom-most stage are beginning to come up, showing us the figure of John Dee, aged 28 in the year 1555 and in prison at the Bishop's palace at Lambeth for the crimes of witchcraft, calculating, conjuring and plotting against the Queen, Mary Tudor. Dee is sharing his cell with a twenty-four-year-old man named Bartlett Green. Now, contrary to my notes for the first scene, I have since discovered no evidence for Bartlett Green being a leper. I'm reluctant to give up the idea of Dee's cellmate being disfigured in some way, as this gives him a somewhat more unearthly and perhaps prophetic aspect. As a compromise Green could be disfigured by a horrendous mask of acne, or perhaps pox-scars. I shouldn't have thought that this was unlikely, given the period.

As the lights come up on the bottom stage, we see that it is masked off to either side of the central illuminated area that represents the cramped and miserable cell in which Dee and Green are confined. The two cellmates sit facing each other in miserable silence for a moment, and then the face of our first guard looms suddenly into view on the projected screen image to our upper left of the stage. A few moments later he is joined by the second guard leaning into view to the upper right of the triangular stage. As the guards recount the details of Dee's life that have led him to his present circumstances, a pageant of hallucinatory fantasy imagery is reeled out across the middle tier of

the stage to accompany this. The imprisoned figures of Green and Dee in the cell remain seemingly oblivious to the guards' dialogue or to the cavalcade of fantasy taking place on the stage just above their heads. When the lights go up, Dee is seated dejectedly on a cot, while Green stands with his back to a wooden support pillar in the middle of their cramped cell, idly picking his scabby face.

Scene Two

Bishop Bonner's Prison at Lambeth Palace, 1555.

First Guard: John Dee, you say? I take it he's the older of the two, the conjuror whose reputation's soiled, while Bartlett Green would be the slim and pretty-bottomed youth who stands and gazes into space, who stands and picks his seeping, weeping, poxy ruin of a face. He looks just like a bleeding angel what's been bleeding boiled.

And yet they languish here in lovely Lambeth for schemes against Her Blessed Majesty: a cell of terrorisers, Protestants or sympathisers now enjoying Bishop Bloody Bonner's hospitality. I'd like to turk the younger cove if given half a chance, provided I need only see him from behind. I'm not so sure about his mate. He conjures and he calculates, works witchcraft with the stars and dates, he charms, and charts, and contemplates, and my knob loses stiffness over matters of the mind.

Second Guard: I wouldn't let his cleverness dissuade you, and of his witchcraft you need have no fear. As for his reputation with math'matic calculation, well, I bet he never counted on his ending up in here. And conjuration is a thing that any man may do, whether we're bragging to the wife or telling lies. We conjure better things than he from naught but our vocabul'ry. Why, we could conjure Master Dee, his life in all its infamy, could summon it for all to see before their very eyes.

Born eight and twenty years since in the shadow of the Tower, where his own dad would later be reviled, he toddles off to Grammar School when but a tender flower then straight to Cambridge he departs where he becomes a dear old, fifteen-year-old Bachelor of the Arts; was reading bleeding Greek when he was just a bleeding child.

FIRST GUARD: You're never telling me that's fucking natural. If more proof of his sorcery you require, a college audience testified he made a massive beetle glide. You're never telling me he done that with some bits of fucking wire.

SECOND GUARD: If you ask me, that's more the work of demons, such as those bound by Solomon the King. To shift a thing of that size, well, then the assembled hordes of Hell are much more likely than some pulleys and some fucking bits of string.

FIRST GUARD: Next thing you know he meets our sixth King Edward, and does well by the wee Protestant lad. But Ed was dead by age fifteen which made his sister Mary queen and she's a howling Catholic nightmare and a lot more like their dad.

BOTH: God blind us, don't remind us of old Henry in his prime. Some of our rulers drool a bit, it's true. We've had some morons, maniacs or monsters in our time, but this is England. What's a man to do?

SECOND GUARD: Though even by our inbred national standard, then Scary Mary's fairly hard to beat when she's so desperate for an heir she's had her womb puff up with air and old Lord North's consid'ring pinching pauper babies off the street.

FIRST GUARD: Then there's her pretty sister kept at Woodstock, with Mary seeing plots at every turn. In such a fearful atmosphere it's little wonder matey here and his friend who's got vomit for a face will more than likely burn.

SECOND GUARD: But then, that's what you get for being clever, and possibly disloyal to the Pope. I can't speak for the younger whelp, but with friend Dee it didn't help that he wrote our beleaguered Queen such a beshitted horoscope.

BOTH: God love us when above us are the stars that guide our fate, be it a crib or shroud, for all to view. God keep the fool who serves a queen with news she's sure to hate, but this is England. What's a man to do?

FIRST GUARD: And so they languish here in lovely Lambeth, a stay which they're unlikely to survive. Their prospects would be clearer if they'd picked another era and not this year of our blessed Saviour, 1555. Their circumstances demonstrate that stars led them astray by failing to anticipate a Royal trend, which proves the future may not be determined by astrology, and that if your theology don't suit a change in monarchy your guardian angels may well be what gut you in the end.

SECOND GUARD: And pissing 'round with sorcery is bound to let you down, especially with a Catholic on the throne. The spirits what you conjure up are no match for the Crown. They won't be with you in the dock. They won't be floating airy-fairy there above the chopping-block. They'll fly off and you'll bleeding end up on your bleeding own.

BOTH: God knows we don't suppose that it's a lesson what they'll learn, and we've a break for ale and mutton due. We should have more concern for those who may well shortly burn, but this is England. What's a man to do?

SOME INTERMEDIARY NOTES

At the conclusion of the guards' dialogue, their giant projected faces duck back out of site on the other side of their barred apertures and our attention moves to Dee and Green in their cell, a masked-off, relatively small area at the centre of the bottom stage. This is set up with Bartlett Green standing idly picking his scabs while he leans against the central wooden support post of the cell. I imagine Dee as sitting on a low prison bench that is placed so as to effectively mask Green's lower body from the audience. We reach a point later in the scene when the somewhat eerie figure of Bartlett Green starts to prophesy what is going to happen to them both. At this point, Green

probably lets his previously active hands rest down by the post at his sides. Then, when he predicts that Dee will be released, we can pull back the curtains or whatever has been masking the sides of the wide bottom stage to show the free world outside the prison. We can also whisk the bench away to show that Green is standing at the post with faggots and firewood heaped around his feet. His hands now look as if they're tied behind his back around the wooden post, which is now the stake he is to be shortly burned at.

The outside world beyond the central cell where Green is singing his prophetic narrative could maybe be depicted with sliding scenery, Elizabethan landmarks amongst which Dee appears to wander lost for a while as Green predicts the demise of Queen Mary. Since this is Green's prophecy and thus in the realm of vision and imagination, we could also engage our middle stage, upon which the figure of Queen Mary with the inflatable pregnancy finally swells to a ridiculously huge size and bursts. All of this action, on both the bottom and central stages, is to briefly fill in the years between 1555 and 1558, which is roughly as follows: in 1556, while Dee is still wandering as if lost amongst the sliding landmarks of an immediately pre-Elizabethan world, Bartlett Green is burned for the imaginary Protestant plot against the Queen. I imagine we show this by having the pyre at his feet burst into flame at this point in Green's prophetic narrative. The flames (probably some sort of special effect, as I imagine these performers have a powerful union) can continue to rise and to devour the unfortunate Green as he continues to sing from the pyre, extending his prophetic narrative beyond the point of his own death as he burns.

Green prophesies that in 1558, Queen Mary dies, followed by Queen Elizabeth's rise to the throne, later in 1558, and the happy union between the new monarch and Dr Dee. We see this acted out upon the bottom stage, where perhaps one of the sliding pre-Elizabethan landmarks might be a kind of gilded cage with a beautiful twenty-five year-old red-headed woman inside it, even if the woman's full splendour is only glimpsed at first, with her turned from the audience as she sits pensively within her golden cage. This is to represent the

young Elizabeth, kept under house arrest at Woodstock until after Mary's death. After Mary's balloon has burst, so to speak, we have the other sliding scenery hauled away to be replaced by items from the dazzling interior of an Elizabethan palace. The gilded cage opens, and Queen Elizabeth emerges for her splendid coronation, as astrologically charted by the loyal John Dee.

In order to distance our Elizabeth from previous portrayals and make her immediately striking and startling, as well as emphasising her otherworldly and erotic aspects, she might have some fabulous psychedelic pseudo-Elizabethan costume that leaves her chalk-white breasts exposed after the fashion of the women in Minoan Crete, a matriarchy where the exposed boobs were seen as exemplifying female power. This would be in keeping with the status of Elizabeth, ruling over what was effectively her own island matriarchy. The pair of them can perhaps be dancing at her coronation while the now almost-incinerated Bartlett Green continues to sing from his blazing stake in the centre of all these lavish celebrations. The fireworks that accompanied the young Queen's coronation might perhaps burst up spectacularly from the wood and kindling at Green's feet as the blackened relic sings the final lines of his prophecy. At the end of the scene, we have the voice of Dee's daughter Katherine intruding upon our narrative, perhaps as if through the young Queen's lips. This is our cue to dim the lights on the lower stages and raise them on the topmost stage, where Dee's protracted reverie has just been interrupted by his daughter entering the dying-room, launching us into our next seven-minute interlude...

DEE: Did I miscalculate? Did I misread the portents writ upon the night's abyss? Did I mishear God's voice or misconstrue the role I thought set out for me by fate? When God commands, what is a man to do? Now He falls silent in my hour of need and leaves me to the stench of my own piss. How has my grand adventure come to this? Where did I err; did I miscalculate?

The angels counselled glory should be mine where I, too quickly, took them at their word and in my vanity believed it true

that future days should hear my praises sung, almost as though t'were already occurred. Are angels not oblivious to time, with our tomorrows plain as yesterdays, our graves and cradles both within their gaze? Their wings beat once and dynasties decline. Who better knows our destinies than they? This was the slippery rock to which I clung, assured by immaterial spirits who see men's lives as a verse's single line. When God commands, what is a man to do? Have I misunderstood some fluttered word or mistranslated a celestial phrase for want of schooling in their crystal tongue? Or were they but hobgoblins of the mind, mere phantoms born of a deluded state? Was it naught save my own voice that I heard? In my belief, did I miscalculate?

GREEN: At last the burning issue is addressed, here where the truth we can no more evade. Were our prayers muttered to the empty air? For all our faith, was anybody there? How strange, then, that dawn finds me unafraid to see my pieties put to the test.

DEE: Sweet Bartlett Green, would thy strength were my own. Though young, thy bravery sets mine to shame. Thou art in truth more innocent than I of the concocted faults that land us here, of playing the conspirator or spy and eager to splash blood upon the throne. Without my learning you are without fear, and I know no more of thee than thy name.

GREEN: Souls such as I are strangers in your heart, fifth business passing back and forth like shades. We speak our messages, sound our refrains, leave softly and are never met again, slipping away into life's masquerade. Pale ghosts, we bring queer tidings, then depart.

DEE: Is this room colder than before you spoke? What is the draft that prickles at my nape? I know thee only as poor Bartlett Green, interrogator Phillpott's former friend, drawn in like him beneath a tainting cloak of accusations lacking form or shape, sprung from the night-fits of a tottering queen whose dark imaginings are without end.

Yet now I know thee in another light, thy ravaged face takes on a different shine. Is this room colder than before you spoke? Whence this chill feather stroking at my spine?

GREEN: Souls such as I know not continuum. We come and go at the Creator's whim and so see more of His design than thee, have glimpsed the props and scenery yet to be, and on my act the footlights now grow dim. I have a vision of the world to come.

DEE: Now am I lost. Is something happening? Attar of roses scents thy reeking sores and all of time falls open at my feet, where reason plunges and is swallowed whole. Pray, what unearthly atmosphere is yours? Why must I tremble at the news you bring as though at the Almighty's judgement seat? A mortal dread is roosted on my soul and sense is fled. Is something happening?

GREEN: My death treads near and brings death's clarity so that each dust-mote blazes like a sun, a morning light too savage to escape that blasts aside the future's threadbare drape: I have a vision of the world to come, a world where none save you remembers me.

GREEN: For thine own self, then, be ye unafraid. A week shall see thee quit this abject place, spared by a queen who frets she'll yet need thee, adrift on London's fraught and listing sea where none but thee recalls this blemished face, before September's russet hand is played.

DEE: Now am I lost on shifting panic streets where nervous and uncertain spectres teem. Which hound to back, which stall to try your luck when the missed guess invites a traitor's death? Mary, half-eaten by maternal dreams? At Woodstock under guard, Elizabeth? With history's sands sucked from beneath our feet the landmarks of the city come unstuck, lost in this ghastly twilight of regime.

GREEN: For sins neither committed nor confessed, inside these walls

shall I receive small ease until they lead me out within the year unto a dismal yard not far from here, with logs and kindling heaped about my knees. At last the burning issue is addressed.

Then ringed about by vile and jeering men I am reduced to crackle, spark and flame. Freed from the charring flesh's heavy yoke I'm took to Heaven as a smudge of smoke where martyrs pierced by arrows know my name, for my complexion shall be flawless then.

And she who lit this pyre I stand upon and had the firewood about me piled, our barren Queen who drapes her realm in chains shall feel at last the longed-for labour pains. What grows within her womb is not a child, and after two more winters she is gone.

DEE: Now am I lost in expectations grand. The soul of carnival is everywhere. Is this a dead queen's funeral array, these bright and joyous ragamuffin tides, lanes hung with coloured lanterns from Cathay and bonfires jubilant throughout the land? At Woodstock fair Elizabeth abides, as though a fairy kingdom were declared.

GREEN: Those with more foresight will have guessed the rest: on fiery copper hair shall sit the crown, her coronation date yours to supply as her enchanter, though enchanted by her snowy teats, the sequins of her gown. At last the burning issue is addressed.

QUEEN: And how shall I reward thee, Doctor Dee? What might I grant these hands that drew my chart? What prize must I upon these lips bestow that told so well my starry destiny? My glamours are reflected in thine eyes, my swan's throat and my profile fit for coins. Come, tell to me each constellation's name, make me the ocean's mistress and the sky's, my name in curlicues on England's heart, and all my dearest favours thou shall know. I shall exhaust thee with my gratitude. White as the gates of Heaven are my thighs, my skin of tallow and my hair of flames. I am the candle burning at your loins. Forgive me, father, if I do intrude.

DEE: Now am I lost in eyes of melted jade. Now am I lost in opportunity both of the flesh and likewise the career, at suck on either alabaster breast. What glories might be mine, and at what cost? Is scholarship that is the all of me by hard cash and hard manhood both betrayed? What is the bargain I am striking here? 'Neath history's perfumed skirts now am I lost.

GREEN: Thine eyes upon her pearl-drenched bosom rest. At last the burning issue is addressed.

QUEEN: A codpiece surely gives away man's mood. You have an agile tongue and shapely knee and I should like to dance with Doctor Dee. Forgive me, father, if I do intrude.

FIRST GUARD: Outside the gates we guard Westminster Palace for our sins. We'll likely miss her Coronation dance. It's said she has six fingers like her mother, Anne Boleyn, and is as ruthless as her dad and has the seeming of one just as scheming and as screaming mad, but we'd all bleeding have her if we had the bleeding chance.

SECOND GUARD: And now we're fucking staunch Elizabethans, attendant on Her Majesty's desire. We torturers and brawlers are now sycophants and crawlers and we wouldn't piss on Mary's grave if it should be on fire. As for how long this one will last we neither know nor care, resigned in both our misery and mirth. We're under no illusion here. We have no cause to be of cheer. Her father's memory is too near. It's different Tudor, different year, and who knows what brute dreams of Empire here are given birth?

BOTH: God keep us should the sleepless giant of England cease to rest, embroiling us in foreign wars anew, where we'll end up with bleeding lances through our bleeding chest, but this is England. What's a man to do?

GREEN: A bloody star now rises in the west. At last the burning issue is addressed.

QUEEN: My sanguine light, of stellar magnitude. Forgive me, father, if I do intrude.

DEE: Now am I lost in recollection's trance, an old man in his memories regressed. Did I embrace her? Did we ever dance?

GREEN: At last the burning issue is addressed.

DEE: Now am I lost. Bright recall fades to gloom, and so ends my nostalgic interlude. I hear my daughter in another room...

QUEEN: Forgive me, father, if I do intrude. Forgive me, father, if I do intrude...

